

Leanne Jijian Hume's story of

# Dominique



My Biological Mother (Bio Mum), who now call herself Dominique, was born May 31st, 1954 to a father with a Swiss father & English mother, and a mother who had a French from France father and a Native Canadian mother. She was born in Chicoutimi, Quebec. When asked about her childhood she will tell you that she's sure there must have been some good memories from when she was small but that she can't really remember any of them because they are so easily weighed down by the negative memories.

Speaking French at home and English in school, her family moved from army base to army base all over the country, every two years. One of her earliest memories is of being in grade one and having already read every single Hardy Boys and every single Nancy Drew Novel in the whole classroom. ...and then they moved, again. Making friends was difficult for Dominique as each new base would mean having to start over. She felt very alone, a lot of the time. The houses were the same each time – small, dark, dreary, military houses. She remembers arriving in Portage La Prairie Manitoba around the time she was 8 or nine and the house being dark and awful, wall paper peeling and her parents fighting all the time. Dominique had a brother who was 11 months younger and two sisters who were also younger but she is still not sure by how many years.

Dominique recalls her parents as being very immature. Neither seemed happy being a parent. Both spent a lot of time blaming others for their misfortunes, and loudly and aggressively blaming each other. She says she eventually left home simply because “it was not a very nice place to live.”

In 1963, at 9 ½ years old, Dominique was playing at the rec center on the military base watching her physical education teacher and his friend practice music on the theatre stage. They took her, alone, to the back of the hall where there was a small dark closet, and both raped her. She ran home and told her parents. Her father called her a whore, and her mother did absolutely nothing at all. She remembers her father saying she was going to turn out just like his sisters. At nine and a half she had no idea what he meant. Today at 54, she still doesn't. Her parents took her to a doctor who said she was going to be fine. The two soldiers were transferred to another military base...

Dominique started running away from home.

She has a hard time remembering anything from the time she was 12 to the time she was 16. She does remember getting picked up by the police a lot and they would bring her back to the house with the peeling wallpaper. One policeman put her in a small cell with no lights and left her there all night. She said that was horrible because she was so scared of dark small places. She still doesn't like getting on an elevator without holding someone's hand. She still has nightmares about the rape.

Dominique says in retrospect her mother really was a child with a child. Both of her parents were immature. Her mother was unhappy and very critical. She spent a lot of time telling her children what they weren't very good at. You're no good with your hands, you can't sew...

Dominique says she always wanted to draw and paint but she never did because her mother told her she was no good with her hands.

In the late sixties Dominique was sleeping outside the parliament buildings in Winnipeg listening to live bands, smoking pot and doing LSD. She says she was too young for the scene, but she was really into it. Every now and then she'd get picked up and carted back to Portage La Prairie and that awful house. In 1971, when Dominique was turning 17, she met her next door neighbor (alias baby maker) a Romanian, French speaking 27 year old. He was nice to her. She said it wasn't hard to pick up a young girl by being nice to her ...when no one else is thinking about her. In the early spring of 1972 Dominique realized she

was pregnant. She immediately stopped taking drugs and started taking care of herself, distancing herself from my birth father. He had just had a baby with another woman a few months earlier, and immediately after Dominique found out she was pregnant... he got one of my mother's friends pregnant as well. She went home and told her parents the news. That was the last time she saw her father for thirty five years.

She travelled to Winnipeg to stay with a girlfriend. When it became apparent that she was going to need some help looking after herself she admitted herself into a Catholic home for wayward girls. The feeling, the emotion she felt during the entire pregnancy was being completely alone. She was very, very lonely. No one came to visit her during her entire pregnancy. She said she did go to a place where she could have had an abortion... but it was a dreary miserable day and she felt like that this was nature's way of telling her, no this isn't for you, you need to give this baby up for adoption.

On August 25th 1972 only seven months into her pregnancy, a 17 year old Dominique, completely alone and away from home, went into early labour. She got home and the Nuns handed her her suitcase and told her to walk to the hospital. One Nun pointedly explained to her that she was "paying for her sins." Dominique had a fast and easy labour and I arrived, all four pounds of me. She held me for a minute until they asked the question and found out she was giving me up. Then they whisked me away to an incubator in the nursery and whisked Dominique away to a room for unwed mothers... far away from the other mother (so she wouldn't contaminate the nice mother's space). She says that was hard, that really was hard. Dominique snuck in through the back door and through the kitchens into the nursery a couple of times just to make sure I was okay. She says that if I had been blind or handicapped she would have kept me. She wrote a letter to me explaining why she gave me up, and asked that I not be placed in a family with ties to the military. The letter disappeared.

Dominique made one last journey back to Portage to see her mother. Her mother had finally left her father and was living with a new boyfriend. At first glance Dominique knew right away she was staying nowhere near this boyfriend, so she packed her bags and left Manitoba. Her two younger sisters were both raped by the boyfriend. She took a plane to Edmonton and found an advertisement in the paper there for a job in the Yukon. She spent from 1972 to 1979 working and travelling all across Northern Canada, moving from place to place, never staying anywhere too long, never taking welfare and never owing anyone anything – two facts she is extremely proud of. She changed her name to Dominique in an attempt to forget the past and sever ties with her family. She didn't contact her mother for five years and her mother never tried to find her. She worked most of the time as a waitress, reading voraciously and learning everything she could.

In 1979 in Notre Dame du Nord, in a small bar attached to the restaurant where she worked, Dominique met Michel. They talked endlessly, loved the same books and the same music (Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, Felix LeClerc, Pink Floyd). In 1982 they decided to get married...for two years. Dominique has always had difficulty making and keeping long term relationships ever since her days moving from military base to military base. After two years they renegotiated and have been married now for 26 years. Dominique lost a child after she and Michel were married but then had a son on November 9th 1984, and another (who she calls her little bit of scotch tape, because he was so cuddly) on August 30th 1988. Being a good mother has been a passion, a calling and true joy for Dominique. She has spent her motherhood creating a stable and loving home for her boys. They still chat every night with Michel by e-mail while Dominique says hi from the background (she hates computers).

In 1999, on August 25th, my 25th birthday, my husband Bob and I flew to Montreal and met Dominique for the first time. I had never seen a picture of her and had no idea what she would look like. When we

arrived at Dorval Airport there she was at the bottom of the escalator doing this hand gesture, and there I was at the top doing exactly the same thing. I brought her a painting of a blueberry bush that I had painted and titled in French for some inexplicable reason. Blueberries (along with wine) are one of her favorite foods. She asked me about the painting and seemed incredibly curious about the fact that I painted. We spent three days together, talking, talking, talking; we walked around art galleries and talked more; I met her sons; I met her mother who looked like she had lived a thousand years on caffeine and nicotine; we looked at photos; and then we went on our way. It was such a comfortable visit, like meeting a long lost friend.

That year Dominique took up painting. She made over 300 oil paintings that year alone. She is still taking painting and drawing classes. She's amazing. She is starting to develop her own style, and freakily enough she and I have actually painted the same painting...without ever having talked about it. She also wants to learn how to use pastels so that she can sketch when her and Michel are camping...the oil paints are too much, too much to pack!!

When I started working on this I realized there were a lot of questions I didn't know the answers to, so I started to ask them. She wishes she could have stayed in school and finished journalism. She wants to travel more, and she can't wait to be a grandmother. Her nickname instead of being called Gran Mere is Dodo. She would like to meet my daughter Vivian someday. Her favorite piece of jewelry is her wedding ring...which was actually a 25th wedding anniversary gift because she and Michel didn't have enough money to buy wedding rings for each other when they married. The only thing she still has from when she was a girl is a collection of books, old and yellow and falling apart, which she loves. She says they helped her escape from reality when she was a little girl.

Dominique's mother died in April 2006, having been on welfare for most of the later years of her life. Dominique says she tried to help her out as best she could...but her mother didn't really take good care of herself. After 35 years of no contact, her father suddenly showed up on her doorstep and asked if he could stay for a few days. Dominique said yes... and says instantly all of her anger dissolved. All she could see standing on her step was an old, old stranger. An old man she didn't know. I asked if she ever tried to talk to her mother or father about her childhood. She said yes, she did, but her mother would just dissolve in tears and run away. She said, "Anyway, really, eh... the present is so much more important than the past."